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## **A TRIBUTE TO JACQUES HERSH**

### **EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF**

### **DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**On the Occasion of his Retirement as Director of DIR**

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The Palestinian-American Scholar, Edward Said, once defined the intellectual as "someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot be easily co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug. He is particularly harsh on those who become servants of power, handmaidens of authority, propagating the dominant ideas of the day".

This is exactly what Jacques Hersh has been: An intellectual with a responsibility to address the large issues rather than remaining buried in a narrow specialisation, speaking a coded language comprehensible only by other specialists. He has been motivated by the desire to answer analytical questions of substantive interest rather than the desire or attempt to validate general theoretical perspectives. Modesty and resistance against ivory tower preaching have been important virtues that he has welcomed and encouraged, well aware of the historical fact that what some people regard as common sense today may change to its opposite tomorrow.

Jacques was born in Paris in 1935, and received accreditation from the City College of New York, the University of Vienna, and the University of Copenhagen. He moved to Denmark in 1964 with his wife and colleague, Ellen Brun, where they worked as free lance writers on development issues and international relations, publishing among other things their pioneering work on development in North East Asia. In 1983, Jacques became a Professor in Development Theory and International Relations at Aalborg University. Together with Ellen and other colleagues, he continued to write in the press, edit magazines, and contribute numerous publications on a variety of subjects including the system of capitalist development, Soviet-Third World relations, and the US's role in the rise of East Asia.

Jacques was a main force in the establishment of the Research Centre on Development and International Relations (DIR) in 1995, and served as its Director until his retirement in October 2003. Among Jacques' merits is his contribution to the cultivation and establishment of a unique dialectical and critical research tradition at DIR. This is manifested in its interdisciplinary approach aimed at understanding the interactions between geopolitics, geoeconomics and the socio-political forces at the global, regional and local levels, and their impact on our conceptualisations of the dynamics which global development imposes on local societies and the latter's responses to it. Through DIR, Jacques endeavoured to keep alive the radical spirit that contributed to the university's establishment. Above all, he touched deeply young people in the classrooms by imparting his knowledge and experience.

Jacques and Ellen have spoken out in public all their lives without surrender or compromise to injustice. They have lived an examined life as thinker-activists, as rebels for justice, as warriors for a non-degrading and ethical life for all people. They have related to newcomers not as strangers but as friends, welcoming them with open arms and working together with them. Their efforts have spanned a vast spectrum from the academic world to the real world. Combined with their profound thoughtfulness and disarming humility, Jacques and Ellen are truly admirable people.

With retirement, Jacques is ending his chapter in the formal academy and starting afresh a new chapter with his earned "right to laziness" (to paraphrase the title of a book by Karl Marx's son-in-law, Paul Lafargue). But a thinker-activist never really retires. Jacques everyday presence will be missed, but we look forward to a continued connection with him and new type of collaboration in a more virtual, spiritual and political sense.

While many people influence one's life, few are remembered for the special way they touch one's soul and humanity as Jacques and Ellen have. We wish them success and all the best with their new beginning.

From your friends at DIR